

For Immediate Release

June 16, 2014

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Thelma Whitewater Presented Award for Work to Prevent Elder Abuse

Winnebago – Thelma Whitewater, elder abuse prevention coordinator, Indian Health Services, Winnebago Reservation, was presented Tuesday (6/17) with the first annual Elder Abuse Prevention Advocate of the Year award for northeast Nebraska by the Department of Health and Human Services for promoting information about elder abuse and neglect.

LaDonna Mead, DHHS child/family services specialist supervisor, made the presentation at the Senior Center on the Winnebago Reservation. The award was presented as a part of DHHS' observance of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day.

Mead cited Whitewater for her work to increase awareness of elder abuse and neglect and to remind Nebraskans that if they suspect abuse to call 1-800-652-1999.

"Thelma has organized a comprehensive observance of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day," she said. "She created multiple effective, culturally specific outreach materials, as well as a community guide of resources for the elders and has spearheaded an effort to update the Tribal Code regarding elder abuse."

Mead also praised her inclusion of youth in the observance, including a poster contest with the winner's picture placed on a billboard.

The Elder Abuse Prevention Advocate of the Year award is sponsored by the Department of Health and Human Services to recognize Nebraskans across the state who work to protect the elderly.

"The work of many Nebraskans to increase awareness of the signs of elder abuse is important to protect the elderly from abuse and neglect," said Thomas Pristow, DHHS director of Children and Family Services. "It's a partnership and we need everyone's help to identify those who many need our assistance. During this observance of World Elder Abuse Awareness we want all Nebraskans to take extra time and observe the elderly around them to ensure they are physically, mentally and financially healthy and report it to the Adult Abuse and Neglect Hotline if they aren't. It's our responsibility."

“Our elderly deserve no less than our best protection,” said Courtney Miller, DHHS deputy director in Medicaid and Long-Term Care. “When friends and loved ones recognize those signs and report it, then we’re able to help them protect the well-being of Nebraska’s elderly citizens.”

Mead encouraged Nebraskans to watch for elder abuse and urged those who suspect it has occurred to call the Adult Abuse and Neglect Hotline at 1-800-652-1999. Among the signs of elder abuse, are:

- Unexplained signs of injury such as bruises, welts, or scars, or broken bones, sprains, or dislocations.
- Bruises around breasts or genitals, or torn, stained, or bloody underclothing.
- Unusual weight loss, malnutrition, dehydration.
- Untreated physical problems, such as bed sores, and unsanitary living conditions like dirt, bugs, soiled bedding and clothes.
- Significant withdrawals from the elder’s accounts, or sudden changes in the elder’s financial condition.
- Items or cash missing from the senior’s household.
- Problems with the care facility: poorly trained, poorly paid, or insufficient staff; crowding; inadequate responses to questions about care.
- Reports of drug overdose or apparent failure to take medication regularly (a prescription has more remaining than it should).

If abuse is suspected, call the Adult Abuse and Neglect Hotline at 1-800-652-1999. The call may be anonymous.